

For Caregivers, Friends and Family

If you are providing care for a patient or a family member who is taking a prescription opioids for pain, it is important that you are aware of the potential risks associated with their medication. These include the potential risk of dependency, addiction, overdose, and death, as well as how to prevent overdose.

When talking to your patient or family member's doctor about prescription pain medications, ask the following questions:

- Why do they need this medication?
- Is this medication addictive?
- What are the benefits?
- What are the risks?
- What are the side effects?
- What is the safest way to manage their pain?
- Are there non-opioid options I can use?
- How does this medication interact with other drugs they are taking?
- How long should they take this drug?
- What is the risk of overdose?
- Do they need a prescription for naloxone?

What do I need to know about dependency and addiction?

It may not be easy to tell if someone is becoming addicted to prescription opioids. Perhaps you've noticed changes in your patient's or loved one's moods or behavior that don't add up. Even if you can't point to anything specific, addressing your concerns could save their life.

Taking opioids as prescribed reduces the likelihood someone will become addicted. However, not taking prescription opioids as prescribed or for an extended period of time increases the



If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder, also known as addiction, we can help.

Call anytime, toll-free.



For Caregivers, Friends and Family

risk of misuse, addiction, overdose, and death. Studies suggest that up to one-third of people who take opioids for chronic pain misuse them, and more than 10 percent become addicted over time.

Your patient or loved one is also at increased risk of addiction if he or she obtains opioids without a prescription, and using opioids illegally increases the risk of drug-related death. Drugs that pass hands illegally, such as fentanyl may be laced with life-threatening contaminants or much more powerful opioids. And people who use opioids illegally often turn to heroin, which is a cheaper alternative to prescription opioids that has similar effects.

Signs of misuse, dependency and addiction

People who are addicted to opioids may still hold down jobs and other responsibilities, maintaining the appearance of stability at work and home. Over time, however, the addiction is likely to lead to serious problems. When a person is addicted to a drug, he or she will continue to use the drug even when it makes his or her life worse.

Common signs of opioid addiction include:

- Regularly taking an opioid in a way not intended by the doctor who prescribed it, including taking more than the prescribed dose or taking the drug for the way it makes a person feel
- Taking opioids "just in case," even when not in pain
- Mood changes, including excessive swings from elation to hostility
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Borrowing medication from other people or "losing" medications so that more prescriptions must be written
- Seeking the same prescription from multiple doctors, in order to have a "backup" supply
- Poor decision-making, including putting himself or herself and others in danger



If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder, also known as addiction, we can help.

Call anytime, toll-free.



For Caregivers, Friends and Family

If someone you love is addicted to opioids, you're also likely to experience changes in your thoughts and behaviors. You may find yourself:

- Worrying about your loved one's drug use, ranging from persistent anxiety to full-blown fear that your loved one is going to die
- Lying or making excuses for your loved one's behavior
- Withdrawing from your loved one to avoid mood swings and confrontations
- Thinking about or acting on the urge to call the police when your loved one uses drugs or uses illegal means to obtain them

It's common — and entirely human — to avoid addressing your concerns for fear your relationship or family will fall apart. Some addiction experts now recommend that doctors interview family members and caregivers as part of routine follow-up care for a person taking opioid medications. But don't wait to be asked before you voice your concerns. If you think your loved one may be addicted to opioids, talk with his or her doctor right away.

SOURCE: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/prescription-drug-abuse/in-depth/how-to-tell-if-a-loved-one-is-abusing-opioids/art-20386038>



If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder, also known as addiction, we can help.

Call anytime, toll-free.



For Caregivers, Friends and Family

Preventing Overdose

Death from an opioid overdose happens when too much of the drug overwhelms the brain and interrupts the body's natural drive to breathe. Signs and symptoms when people overdose on opioids includes:

- Their face becomes extremely pale and/or feels clammy to the touch
- Their body goes limp
- Their fingernails or lips have a purple or blue color
- They start vomiting or making gurgling noises
- They cannot be awakened or are unable to speak
- Their breathing or heartbeat slows or stops

It may be hard to tell if a person is high or experiencing an overdose. If you aren't sure, it's best to treat it like an overdose— you could save a life.

- Call 911 immediately
- Give naloxone, if available
- Give rescue breathes, as needed, until person starts breathing or help arrives
- If person is still not breathing after 2 – 3 minutes of rescue breathing, give another naloxone dose, if available
- Once the patient wakes up, try to keep the person awake and breathing
- Lay the person on their side to prevent choking
- Stay with him or her until emergency workers arrive



If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder, also known as addiction, we can help.

Call anytime, toll-free.



For Caregivers, Friends and Family

Naloxone

Ask your doctor about naloxone – a safe medication that can quickly stop an opioid overdose. It can be sprayed into the nose or injected into the muscle to treat an opioid overdose when given right away.

Naloxone is a medicine that works by rapidly binding to opioid receptors and blocking the effects of heroin and other opioid drugs. Sometimes more than one dose may be needed to help a person start breathing again, which is why it's important to call an ambulance and get the person to an emergency department as soon as possible.

Naloxone is available as a nasal spray, an injectable (needle) solution, and a handheld auto-injector. You don't have to be a health care professional to give naloxone. Friends, family, and others in the community can use it to save someone who is overdosing.

The rising number of opioid overdose deaths has led to an increase in public health efforts to make naloxone available to at-risk persons and their families, as well as first responders and others in the community. California allows pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a doctor's prescription.

SOURCES

National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/heroin>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/pdf/patients/Preventing-an-Opioid-Overdose-Tip-Card-a.pdf>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/treatment/opioid-overdose>

Updated June 2019



If you or someone you know has a substance use disorder, also known as addiction, we can help.

Call anytime, toll-free.



Treatment Works and Recovery Is Possible